

For 2009 Budget Hearings

**QUESTIONS TO ASK JOAN MANKE
OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION OFFICE**

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I. COST OF REDUCING THE NUMBER OF NEIGHBORHOOD BOARDS

Q. There's been discussion of reducing the number of Neighborhood Boards. Is the primary reason for this, reducing the number of Neighborhood Boards, to reduce costs for the NCO?

A. (The answer to all the questions in Section I is a simple "Yes." If the answer is something other than that, then why is she being evasive?)

Q. To reduce the number of Boards, that would require changes to the boundaries. Is that correct?

Q. Is it correct, according to the Neighborhood Plan, that before Neighborhood Board boundaries can be changed, public hearings must be held?

Q. Is it correct, again, according to the Neighborhood Plan, that a MINIMUM of 2 public hearings must be held for each boundary change?

Q. So to change any one Neighborhood Board, a MINIMUM of 2 public hearings would have to be held? That's just to alter the boundaries of one NB?

Q. So for 33 Neighborhood Boards, that would be a MINIMUM of 66 public hearings?

Q. Is it correct that the Neighborhood Commission Office, conducts and pays for these public hearings?

Q. What's involved in a public hearing? Do you have to:

- Rent, or at least find a facility?
- Place public notices, advertisements?
- Prepare many copies handouts and other various materials?
- Record minutes of all these hearings?
- Retain the records of all these hearings?
- Mailings
- Devote staff time to this?
- Take staff off other projects so that they could devote their time to this?
- At the risk of not completing other tasks?

Q. So reducing the number of Boards isn't going to reduce costs, it's going to increase costs. Isn't that correct?

Q. And you would have to do this a MINIMUM of 66 times?

Q. What are some of the other costs of these MINIMUM of 66 public hearings? Do you involve Corporation Counsel? At least for consultation?

Q. (Comment) So it appears to me that reducing the number of Neighborhood Boards isn't going to only increase the cost and budget for the NCO, it's going to increase the cost and the budget of other departments, such as Corp. Counsel.

A. (Again, the answer to all these questions should have been a simple "Yes." If it wasn't, why was she being evasive?)

II. COST OF TRYING TO REDUCE COSTS

Q. I've heard of e-mails going around that state a couple of the Neighborhood Boards are objecting to a new process that you are trying to put in place? Is that correct?

A. Yes. Last month, the Neighborhood Commission passed a motion that a template for agendas and minutes will be tried for 6 months.

Q. That's it? And, according to e-mail going around, a couple Boards are passing resolutions to not use this template?

A. Yes.

Q. Why don't these Boards want to use the template?

A. They feel as though it's a mandate and they don't want something that they feel is being forced onto them.

Q. I've even been told that you and the Managing Director are going to the Neighborhood Boards to talk to them about these templates. Is that correct?

A. Yes.

Q. I've also heard that some of the Neighborhood Boards are saying things like, "Just leave our Board alone."

A. That's correct.

Q. Is the purpose of this template to streamline processes and save costs?

A. Yes.

Q. If the Boards won't cooperate, wouldn't it be wise to just cut them loose and let them do it their own way and then we could save money?

A. (Anticipate evasive answer.)

Q. Is it permissible, under the Plan, for the Boards to take their own minutes?

A. We provide for 3 hours, (7:00 PM to 10:00 PM) of minute recording. After 10:00 PM, the Boards have to record their own minutes. And, each Neighborhood Board also has several committees. When these Board committees have their monthly meetings, they have to record their own minutes.

Q. Here's my thought on this, and no answer is needed from you. So, if they can do this, record these minutes, why don't we just let them? Why should we continue to pay for something that they can do? They seem to want to work on their own. Why don't we just let them, like so many other groups already do?

III. COST OF COMPLAINTS

Q. I'm interested in what other expenses you create that don't show up on your budget. Let's get back to Corp. Counsel. I'm aware, that for the new Plan, you MIGHT not need as much time from Corp. Counsel, but under the old Plan, don't you need them for complaints?

A. Yes.

Q. How much Corp. Counsel time do you think you need on the complaints under the old Plan?

A. I couldn't answer that. They would have to.

Q. But you could estimate, couldn't you?

A. (A legitimate estimate and answer should be a week or two of Corp. Counsel time for each complaint. If she answers less time, then she has no idea of all this is required from Corp. Counsel to work on a complaint.)

Q. Perhaps the NCO uses about a minimum of 40 to 80 hours of attorney time for each complaint under the old Plan?

A. (She should be able to at least guess that much.)

Q. How many complaints do you have outstanding under the old Plan?

A. 25.

Q. So 25 times 40 is 1000 and 25 time 80 is 2000. So that's an estimate of 1000 to 2000 hours of attorney time just to tackle your outstanding complaints under the old Neighborhood Plan?

A. That's my guess.

Q. Do you use Corp. Counsel under the new Neighborhood Board Plan?

A. Yes.

Q. For complaints?

A. Yes.

Q. Have you received any complaints under the new Plan?

A. Yes.

Q. How do you use Corp. Counsel for the new complaints?

A. They're providing guidance on how to navigate our way through the process. But we can decide if complaints are legitimate or not. We don't need Corp. Counsel for that anymore.

Q. But if you decide a complaint is not legitimate, the person who filed the complaint can appeal. Is that correct?

A. Yes.

Q. Then you would need Corp. Counsel. Right?

A. Yes.

Q. For about 40 to 80 hours per appealed complaint?

A. I guess.

Q. So your use of Corp. Counsel time is a big expense to the City and County, to the taxpayers, that just doesn't show up in your budget. Correct?

A. Yes.

Q. I've heard about some of these complaints, and I'm a little distressed that we put so much time and money into these complaints. Tell me about some of these complaints.

A. (Anticipate evasiveness. The answer should be that the VAST majority of the complaints are frivolous and a waste of the budget.)

Q. (If the answer is evasive, pursue it with these questions.)

Q. I've heard that most of the complaints the NCO receives are complaints that say that a board member interrupted someone, or maybe was rude. For this we're spending 1000 to 2000 hours of attorney time?

A. Yes.

Q. This all seems pretty costly to me. In all this, these costly objections and resolutions to a template that they are only being asked to try and these costly complaints, there's one thing that I'm not hearing from the Neighborhood Boards. I'm not hearing them say a single thing about how they care about their community. I'm not hearing them say a single things about how their objections or costly complaints are serving or going to, in some way, help the community.

Q. Once again, I'm left with this thought. They can record their own minutes, and they want to work on their own, without any input from anybody, then why don't we just let them? Why should we continue to pay for something that they can do? Why should we continue to pay for something that other groups already do for free? Why don't we just eliminate the Neighborhood Board system and let them continue on their own, like so many other groups already do?

A. (Answer might be a reference to the Charter, Article 14, providing a Neighborhood Board system.)

Q. (Comment.) Thank you. I think I've already made my points.

Q. (Comment.) There's nothing to stop us from suspending the funding. In this time of fiscal crisis, a MILLION dollar budget means A LOT to taxpayers, especially when it comes to funding a system that sounds like it's in a shambles.